

APPENDIX B

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING HELD ON 23RD MARCH 2017 QUESTIONS TO COMMITTEE CHAIRMEN

Question to the Chairman of the Transport and Highways Committee, from Councillor Jacky Williams

Is the Chairman aware that potholes (certainly in and around Stapleford) are being repaired to a sub-standard quality, in many cases, by sub-contractors employed by VIA, such that they are subsequently requiring further attention within a short time span, which must be costing this Council additional money?

Response from Councillor Kevin Greaves, Chairman of the Transport and Highways Committee

With regards to the sub-standard potholes reported, VIA will carry out investigations into the standards of repair to potholes in the locations specified and will take appropriate action should we find that repairs have not been carried out to the required quality standard.

Reactive highways maintenance work is normally completed by VIA's own resources, but there are times when the workload is such that additional subcontractor resources are engaged. These resources are subject to regular inspection by VIA's operational managers for quality and consistency of work. If a problem is found, action is taken to correct this. We will provide an overview of our findings following our investigations but if there is any further specific detail that Councillor Williams can provide in terms of locations, then we will directly review these areas.

Question to the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee, from Councillor Michael Payne

Would the Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee agree with me that the Conservative Government's current education spending plans and 'fair funding formula' are of serious concern, particularly given the fact that virtually every school in Nottinghamshire is set to lose funding?

Response from Councillor John Peck JP, Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee

Yes I certainly do agree, I am very concerned about the funding situation in our Nottinghamshire Schools and every Councillor in this Chamber should be concerned.

I want to make it clear first of all, that in principal I am in favour of a national funding formula. I say that as somebody who has campaigned for some 20 odd years for exactly that. In 1991 I think it was 1990/1991, local management of schools was bought in when schools had their own budgets and initially local authorities were left to their own devices as to how they devised a formula and typically, as in Nottinghamshire, the formula was designed to as far as possible, match historical costs and expenditure and the formulas that were devised initially were extremely

complex byzantine structures that barely anybody understood. Extremely complex, and right from the start my own association, the National Association of Head Teachers called for a national funding formula that was fair across the country, between local authorities, between schools and between phases.

I can remember working with this Local Authority over the course of a year on a working party, to try and devise a needs funding formula based on the needs of particular schools. That was kicked into the long grass because in the end the conclusion was that schools required far more funding than the Local Authority was able to give. I also spent time on the national executive of the NHT on a funding working group trying to come up with workable funding formula. This has been extremely difficult. Successive governments have promised a national funding formula for schools and then when the figures have come out and they have seen the numbers of winners and losers, have baulked at that stepped back from it and kicked it into the long grass.

I do want to be fair to the Government because thus far they have got further than those successive governments who have promised to institute a national funding formula and then failed to deliver. But, they are now facing the problem that successive governments have faced, and that is that there are winners and losers, inevitably, there are winners and losers both between local authorities and between schools. What the Government have come up with if it were implemented in its present form and bearing in mind it is a consultation at the moment that only finished yesterday, but if that were implemented in its present form and without any additional funding, it would be nothing less than a financial disaster for many schools, including many in Nottinghamshire as Councillor Payne has referred to earlier on, in his division.

To give you some idea on present calculations based on what we have before us at the moment that we have been consulted upon. Of our 327 schools in Nottinghamshire 55%, 179 will see a budget reduction and the largest budget reduction will be 2.9% capped at 1.5% in the first year. 11 secondary schools, that is a quarter of our secondary schools, fall into that category. That may not sound that much, 2.9%, but believe me on a secondary budget that is enormous. Now at the moment what I am talking about is the Government's fair funding formula. Councillor Payne was referring to all Nottinghamshire schools losing, and they will, and I will come to that in a moment.

I started by saying I support a fair national funding formula in principle and I do believe it is absolutely right that the Government has put forward proposals, but the formula as it is proposed, seems to be anything but fair, in my view. And it is a disappointment not only to me but to others in the F40 group that we have belonged to as a Local Authority for many a long year, and many of that F40 group are of course Conservative controlled councils. I have put my signature, in the last few days, to a letter to the Secretary of State from F40 pointing out some of the difficulties with the formula as presented

I never expected that a new 'fair funding' formula could end up being so unfair as what we have before us at the moment. I am alarmed that so many of our schools are losers and I really fail to understand why this should be the case when many of those schools are already poorly funded and funded well below the national average. What we

should be doing is to be “levelling up” the funding rather than sharing out a pot that simply isn’t large enough in the first place.

It is vital that the basic level of funding allocated to all schools is adequate for every school to be able to operate efficiently and offer the level of education that we would want to see for our children. If this new formula goes through as it is presently constructed, schools will be caught in a perfect storm and this is the point that Councillor Payne was referring to, because they will struggle to meet their core responsibilities. Because, on top of the fair funding formula if that were not happening at all, the National Audit Office report of December 2016 indicated that cost increases to schools during the rest of this Parliament up to 2020, so another 3 years, they would be facing an 8% cut anyway. So all of our schools on average would be facing that level of cut. That is because of rising costs including such things as employer’s national insurance contributions, increased pension contributions.

So when the Government have been telling you disingenuously that they have been protecting schools budgets that just simply is not true, because they are only telling you one part of it. They are not telling you all of the increased costs that schools are facing and that in real terms they are facing a massive cut. So, if you are one of those schools that, on top of that are getting a cut through the so called fair funding formula, then you are in, as I describe it, a perfect storm and an extremely difficult situation and that can only translate into one thing because 80% of any schools budget is staffing costs. So it will mean less teaching assistants, less teachers, less resources for children and that is beginning to happen now, because of the underfunding. So, you place this on top and you are going to see your schools across the county in dire straits. Head Teachers in your patch will be coming to you, if they are not already, and telling you exactly what is happening. Stability for schools in funding is important but not at the expense of never reaching a fair formula and outcome. In practice schools in lower funded areas will be subsidising those in better funded areas.

I and other F40 members understand that this consultation is about finding a fair funding methodology and not about just the quantum of funding and trying to divide it up differently. But, schools in lower funded areas have been making cuts for many years and Nottinghamshire is and always has been one of the lower funded areas. Significantly lower funded than just across the bridge in the City for example. But I don’t want to see a situation where we are setting authority against authority and school against school. The simple fact is there just is not enough funding in the situation. I am struggling to understand where schools can make more cuts, in the lowest funding authorities in which I include Nottinghamshire. On top of this all schools are facing, as I’ve indicated, significant additional costs. This review of school funding formula is a once in a generation opportunity to get it right, because as I say, we have been talking about this for 20 years. It is vitally important that one injustice is not replaced with another and we hope that Central Government will do everything in their power to ensure that the outcome of this is fair. I think it is going to need perhaps another U turn by the Government.

In my view, what is required is for the government to do basically two things. Firstly, in the light of the consultation responses, to review the proposed formula they have put before us and secondly, to accept that additional resources have got to be put in. For example the £320 million the Chancellor announced in the budget which was for

selective education and Free Schools. I think if you talked to most of the head teachers in your patch, they will be telling you that the £320 million would be better spent, not on some pet project of Theresa May to create more grammar school places in Buckinghamshire or Lincolnshire or wherever, but would be better spent on increasing the school budgets and perhaps making that fair funding formula exactly what it says it is supposed to be. What a complete utter waste of money that is, and in any case the Chancellor appears not to have been able to do his sums because when the £320 million was announced it was to create 140 extra schools. Well, it took me about 10 seconds to work out that you could not create 140 extra schools with £320 million. The Government yesterday came to that conclusion as well and has decided that in fact they cannot achieve that and they have put it back to 2020. Now that money, in my view, if they could find it last week in the Chancellors budget then that should be put into the fair funding formula.

Parents of our children in Nottinghamshire Schools are not going to be too impressed if their school is sacking teachers, teaching assistants and reducing money spent on resources and extra maintenance, whilst money is being spent on expanding grammar schools.

So, yes Councillor Payne you have every right to draw attention to what is happening in your division. It is happening all over the county, it is happening all over the country, the government has got to re-think this, but in the end recognise that education like many areas of public services is being hugely underfunded and that has got to change.

Question to the Leader of the Council, from Councillor Darrell Pulk

As Leader of Nottinghamshire County Council for the past 4 years, Councillor Rhodes has been in a position to oversee the work of the Council and determine its direction. He has been leader of the Labour administration at a time of unprecedented cuts to this Council's funding which, alongside a significant increase in demand for our services, has created a challenging financial environment. Please would he outline this administration's achievements during the 4 years?

Response from Councillor Alan Rhodes, Leader of the Council

I would be absolutely delighted to answer that excellent question from Councillor Pulk. Members will know, and I am sorry that so many Conservatives have felt the sudden need to leave the Chamber, I am sure that they are not heading home early because of course, like the Ashfield Independents we are all paid to be here. But when we came into office in 2013, members will recall that we inherited a financial mess. £133 million worth of deficit in the budget and the then Conservative Government removed a further £25 million worth of grant aid from us. So, we always knew that it was going to be difficult in four years of cuts, closures and redundancies. The Conservatives clearly did not manage the County Council's resources and finances responsibly or particularly well.

I am proud of the fact that our administration has turned that round, yes there is still more work to do on the finances, I absolutely recognise that, but we have made a good start, in extremely difficult circumstances both politically and financially.

I was having a look the other day at some of our literature that we are putting out, all of it of course checked for accuracy and absolutely truthful. We delivered every single pledge that we set out to deliver, every one and more besides. A few months after we took office here, I said that we should introduce a foundation living wage, before George Osborne woke up one morning and thought he would dream up his own version up. But we did deliver that in April 2014 to 2,500 of the lowest paid staff in this Council, giving them the dignity of a decent wage for a decent days work. I think that is something we should all be proud of in this Council actually. Taking people out of poverty pay, people who do extremely difficult jobs for this Council but that are extremely important jobs in our communities. We all know what kind of jobs we are talking about. We are talking about school meal staff, crossing patrol staff, care assistants and so on and so forth, I do not need to rehearse all that. But to me, to provide the values of this administration and their values of fairness and decency and prioritising services wherever possible to the most vulnerable in our communities. I said in the first speech I gave in this Chamber that, that is what we would do and that is what we have tried to do under extremely difficult circumstances.

We have spent over £12 million on providing extra care housing for the elderly and the most vulnerable. Some of them of course in Conservative areas where, we know the Conservatives do not support that particular proposal. We know that extra care is the right thing to do and is the kind of care that people expect and demand of us actually in later years.

We have continued investment in school improvements and in new school building, I agreed that the £5 million finances from this Council to the Orchard Special School in Newark the other day, the governors and staff and parents are absolutely delighted because they have waited for too long for that, for too long. It was a school that would have been funded by government funding before the elections when the Conservatives removed the schools funding and these people were left high and dry. We have been working with them to try and bring Government to the table to find additional funding. The funding gap that is there and it has eventually come to be. I pay tribute to the MP for Newark Robert Jenrick, I am not trying to take all the credit for myself, for ourselves, why would we do that? It has been partnership working with people who are prepared to work with us and I have always said that that is what we would do. If people will work with us we will work with you and I again believe that that has been part of the approach of this administration.

We have opened new school premises all across this county, to take up the increasing demand for what are actually very good schools across Nottinghamshire, there are exceptions, but schools in this county are among the best to be found anywhere in the region. We have spent £43 million on supporting older people. We have invested £20 million each year to help those with learning disabilities, mental illnesses and Asperger's. On the street lights issue we have got a guarantee on keeping street lights on if we are re-elected, so don't read anything to the contrary. There are stories going round that we have got plans to turn them off, they are frankly false. We have invested in 7,000 street lights we have fitted them with low energy bulbs and we will keep them on because that is what our communities demand. We led the campaign against the Conservatives turning off the street lights and it is only right that we continue to keep them on because that is what people want us to do.

150 apprentices have been taken on by the County Council in the four years that we have been in control on this authority. 160 businesses started up with County Councils support, 20,000 children registered in our children's centre and they are safe, with us. We have not closed a children's centre in this county and we do not intend to. We have established Inspire to run our Library and Cultural services, very difficult in times of austerity to argue to keep libraries and cultural activities going, but we have not closed a single library and I would like to pay tribute to the previous administration, neither did they and it is right that we recognise that. Nottinghamshire has fantastic portfolio of library facilities and they are important to all of our communities.

We have established VIA to keep our highways services going and sustainable and ARC to manage our building maintenance and design. These are new ways of working. We said some years ago now at the beginning of this administration, that we are going to redefine the way that this Council works, and we have done. Because we have done that, we have been able to protect services and improve services right across the piece.

So in response to the question, yes I am very proud of what we have achieved. I think our achievements in the most difficult of circumstances politically and financially have been considerable and I believe that this administration has must to be proud of.

Chairman, I am going to end by saying something about members of this Council who have decided to not to seek re-election. There are several in this Council. I am going to start with my own group, Councillor Langton, Councillor John Allin, Councillor Kirkham who I will say something more about in a minute, Councillor Roy Allan, Councillor Calvert, two very well regarded and respected Liberal Democrats, Stan Heptinstall and Ken Rigby and Councillor Liz Yates and Councillor Tony Roberts, both of them highly regarded members of the Conservative Group, I have known Liz and her husband Terry for many years and I have always regarded them well. I am firmly of the view that people become members of a council for the right reason, and that reason is because they want to improve the communities that they serve. I believe that every member of this council has done their best to do that, in the way that they believe is the right way. We may disagree sometimes, we may have very strong differences of opinion; we may not share the same direction of travel. But I do believe that it is right Chairman to say thank you to those members who have taken the decision to stand down and thank you to all of you, for everything you have done for Nottinghamshire and for this Council, because your service is above and beyond the call of what anyone would reasonably expect.

So Chairman, we have come to the end of this particular term of office. I do not know what the outcome of the election is and I think anybody who will predict it and believe that they know what the outcome is going to be is a fool, because politics is so unpredictable these days, it is impossible to predict. But what I do know is that on May 5th this Council will continue to deliver the best possible services to the people of this county and I think we should collectively along with all our officers, and I must pay tribute to Anthony May and his team. We will collectively do our best to serve the people of this County. So thank you very much.